DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 525 PS 008 094

AUTHOR Bell, T. H.
TITLE School Leadership and the Community.
PUB DATE 13 Apr 75
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 13, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development Centers; Community Planning; *Early Childhood Education; Health Services; *Home Programs; Neighborhood Centers; Neighborhood School Policy; Nutrition; Outreach Programs; Parent Education; Preschool Children; *School Community Programs; School Community Relationship; *School Services

ABSTRACT

The importance of using existing local elementary school facilities to benefit preschool children and their neighborhoods forms the basis for suggestions offered in this address. Comprehensive child and community development centers can be created in the schools that would benefit the community by increasing general concern for a higher quality living environment, and benefit the children by preparing them for formal schooling. Elementary schools can become sponsors of home-based preschool education programs through: (1) conducting parenting and outreach classes; (2) coordinating health and welfare programs by providing diagnostic public health services for preschoolers that would be concerned with child welfare, nutrition, and the early identification of handicapping situations; and (3) using existing school library facilities for lending books and toys and conducting clinics and learning seminars. Reasons for using a home-based approach (as opposed to a center-based approach) in promoting preschoolers' development are outlined. Potential gains for the children and the community are stated in both human and economic terms. (ED)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED111525

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY *

T. H. Bell

U.S. Commissioner of Education

I've noticed lately that many comedians seem to be making their neighbors or their community the butt of many of their jokes -- from the "cup of sugar" gag to Bill Cosby's creation of Fat Albert. This puzzles me. I've always felt that to live in a close-knit neighborhood is an enviable situation -- one, I'm sorry to say, that seems to be fading from the American scene.

Many Americans are too restless, too driven by a sort of wanderlust to remain where their parents and grandparents settled. Some stay but are in too much of a hurry to be neighborly -- trying to juggle a full-time job with children, pets, and 18 holes of golf. Others have been neighborly only to become a crime statistic.

Let's get this country back into community life, get people back to helping one another. As educators we could do much towards accomplishing this. We reach many people of all ages in the neighborhoods our schools serve -- from the youngest tot to parents and grandpatents. Our neighborhood schools could become one of the most important shaping forces in our communities today.

PS 008094

---

* Prepared for annual convention of the National Association of Flementary School Principals; Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 13, 1975, 10:30 A.M. CDT (11:30 A.M. EDT).

Across this country we have thousands of elementary schools located in centers of population -- close to where people live -- and reaching into millions of homes every day. But for these schools to be close to the people geographically isn't enough. As I see it, they must come closer psychologically. We must make a greater effort to use our neighborhood schools as a means of reaching our children, of making the American dream of equality of opportunity a reality.

Equality of opportunity means education to meet individual needs . . . education that will bring out the best that is in everyone . . . that will give each student the opportunity to develop his or her full potential as a human being. That may sound trite, but it is our aspiration for public education.

Today's preschool children will become our elementary school students in a few years. As educators we have an enormous stake in how these children develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

I believe the evidence is now overwhelming that the experience of the first few months and years in a child's life determines, to a great extent, whether he or she will be equipped to enjoy and profit from later life. Pride and pleasure in self, ability to relate to others, to reason, to imagine -- all these characteristics are largely established by the time the child comes through the school door.

Any loss in human ability by anyone affects all of us. The loss of valuable human potential means millions of dollars in economic loss and burdens all facets of society.

Because of the wide acceptance of these facts, I have been advocating a new and expanded role for elementary schools. Every one of your schools should, as I see it, function not only as an institution of learning but also as a comprehensive child and community development center. We must improve the quality of life for all preschool children. And the elementary school holds the key to this essential goal.

It is a curious thing to me that our education system has not designed a program to help parents learn the essential skills of parenting, a program to strengthen the home as an educational influence. There are some simple facts and easy to master skills that can effectively influence the learning potential of children. We need to teach these facts and simple skills to parents, and this can best be sponsored by the elementary school.

Evidence shows that the most effective schools are those located in a neighborhood of stable homes, where knowledgeable parents expose their children to constant encouragement and positive reinforcement. Instead of wringing our hands over the fact that low income and slum neighborhoods do not produce highly motivated children, why don't we develop and implement a policy to strengthen the parenting capacities and the educational influence of the home in those neighborhoods?

I urge you to look to the homes, the day care centers, and the neighborhoods. I urge you to consider how you might teach basic skills to parents, solid education practices to day care centers. I urge you to lead our neighborhoods to more concern for a higher quality environment.

10604

In urban ghetto, in small rural town, and in affluent suburb, the elementary school would have a strategic advantage in its ability to dispense services to the home, where the child could benefit from birth to age five . . .

Functioning as a comprehensive child development center, the neighborhood school would deliver the social and rehabilitative services offered by State and Federal assistance programs. Both parent and child could be reached through the school. Both parent and child could look to the school as a source of information and assistance. Public health and welfare personnel would, under this concept, coordinate their activities through the school and in harmony with the education program.

The neighborhood school could also function as a center for early childhood development by helping to strengthen the entire child. Like physical, emotional, and attitudinal development, the intellectual development of the total organism is greatly influenced by how the twig is bent.

In its role as a child development center, the neighborhood school could provide public health services to preschoolers. Regular check-ups to find medical and dental problems as early as possible in the child's life mean better health and a happier life. This service would of course be particularly important in low income areas, where parents may lack both the knowledge and the financial means. By providing such services through the school we could avoid costly duplication of facilities and personnel. The child in the ghetto would get a better break early in life, when it counts most for him and when it counts most for society as a whole.

Actually, we already have one program working towards this end. It is EPSDT -- Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment. This is a complex name for a simple goal -- to provide better health care for needy children.

Some 13 million children are eligible for Medicaid -- children we are able to reach through the EPSDT program. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's goal is to reach 2 million children by the end of the fiscal year, but millions more will still be waiting for help.

The EPSDT program is intended to provide preventive services before health problems become chronic and detrimental to the learning process. We hope to increase the chances of welfare children to become productive members of society as adults and, as a result, to become independent of Federal assistance programs.

What I propose is cooperation on EPSDT at all levels -- Federal, State, and local. There are many ways individual schools could become involved in implementing EPSDT in association with county health and welfare agencies. For example, school staffs and facilities could be used for screening and testing. Or schools could tap into existing communication channels to inform parents and community agencies about EPSDT. In any case, interest and cooperation are two key words if we -- all of us together -- are to implement the program successfully.

But to get back to some of the other things the child needs before he enters school . . .

Dr. Benjamin Bloom has told us that each trait, each function that a child acquires can be influenced for good or for ill by outside forces. Outside forces are continually shaping the development of the child throughout early life. What a child learns or does not learn in the formative years could easily enhance or damage both knowledge of self as person and interaction with others in later life.

For example, vocabulary development is vital to much of what a child will subsequently learn. When he or she first starts to understand spoken words, it is time to positively reinforce this development. The child's experience should be rewarding, since ability to communicate with others can be formulated in the preschool years. Parents often unwittingly retard the child's vocabulary development, but if they are made aware of the importance of good habits in the earliest speech-forming years, this need not occur.

(This is one important but simple fact that parents of preschoolers should learn from the outreach and parent training program that could be offered by the elementary school that has assumed the role of child development center.)

The same concept applies to all aspects of the child's development. Persons in education and medicine and in social and psychological services need to help parents understand and encourage the development of various good traits and functions in their children.

I place emphasis here on helping PARENTS help their pre-school children because, as I see it, there is actually no other practical, cost-effective way to provide these vital services.

I strongly support the neighborhood elementary school as a sponsor of home based preschool education. Since a child spends more than 95 percent of the time during the first 5 years of life at home, what better place can there be to instill positive learning experiences? The schools should assume responsibility for helping parents offer such a program in the home.

If asked why I propose the home, rather than the elementary school, as the place to develop the preschool child, I would answer in the following seven ways:

1. An institutionalized preschool approach would be enormously expensive and not very productive.
2. Elementary school nursery programs could reach the child no more than 2 hours per day.
3. Children of 2 and 3 years of age are far too young and immature for public school.
4. Early childhood education should begin no later than age 4 months. Needless to say, the school cannot offer nursery school for children of this age.
5. The home would still have the child for 22 hours each week day plus 24 hours on all other days when school is not in session.
6. Parent responsibility for early childhood teaching might be at least partly abdicated to the school when it MUST be primarily the duty of the parents.

7. There is more than a small chance that schools would do more harm than good by taking very small children away from their mother's care at too early an age.

Cooperation between the school and the home is just one possible way of expanding the neighborhood school into a shaping force in the community.

The neighborhood elementary school should train parents of preschool children in other areas of early child development. Parents should also receive advice and assistance on the health and social aspects of child development. This will, of course, involve health and social service agencies in working with school systems.

The neighborhood school child development center should be alert to severe cases of child abuse and malnutrition. It should be alert for indications of physical and/or mental handicaps in very small children so that early attention can lessen the severity of limitation from such handicaps.

The neighborhood school library could become a source of information on child development to parents of preschoolers. Educational toy lending libraries, clinics, and learning seminars could be housed at the school. With a decrease in the birth rate and with declining elementary school enrollment, some of our schools already have the space to house these services.

By placing emphasis on education, the school community and child development center would reach the mind of both parent and preschooler.

By placing emphasis on the home we would accrue the following six advantages:

1. All the assistance that parents need to develop the whole child would be centered in one place.
2. The home would be strengthened by placing responsibility where it belongs. We would put our emphasis on each home doing as much as possible for child development with assistance when needed from the center.
3. The child would be reached in the earliest months of life, when the timing is right, so that neglect and oversight of needs would be kept to a minimum.
4. The proper working relationship among parent, child, and school would be strengthened.
5. Less money would be needed than is needed with education, health, and social service agencies working independently as they do now.
6. Home based preschool programs with school assistance would avoid placing the child in school before he or she is mature enough to leave the security of the home. It would also provide a natural bridge for the child to cross into kindergarten.

The kind of conversion I have been suggesting -- turning the neighborhood school into a community center -- could take place in a school district where the school board and the county health and welfare services have a common desire to work out the details of cooperation.

I don't minimize the importance of those details or the difficulties in working them out, but I am certain that the goal is one shared equally by all those concerned with the growth and dynamics of a neighborhood. The potential gains in human and economic terms for the community are huge.

I believe America asks the most of you who are entrusted with educating her young. Together with parents, you must lay the foundation on which a child's entire perception of formal education -- and life itself -- is built.

# # # # # # #